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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: IRAN/ELECTIONS: "THE MOST DYNAMIC WEEK IN IRANIAN
POLITICS SINCE 1979"

REF: A)ISTANBUL 14 B)ISTANBUL 47

Classified By: Deputy Principal Officer Sandra Oudkirk; Reason 1.5 (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: Former Iranian MFA Director General Kia Tabatabaee (please protect) told us June 10 that not since the 1979 revolution has he seen such a dynamic week in Iranian politics. He said the televised debates (especially the airing of corruption charges and personal attacks), the massive peaceful pro-Mousavi demonstrations in major cities, and the June 9 "warning" letter from former President Rafsanjani to Supreme Leader Khamenei are shocking and unprecedented and have left most Iranians anxious, giddy, hopeful, and "holding their breath" to see what happens June ¶12. He predicts Ahmadinejad and Mousavi will advance to a second round, where he thinks Ahmadinejad is still the man to beat, based on a likely rural surge of voters. Tabatabaee predicted that even if Ahmadinejad wins, Khamenei will keep him on "a very short leash", and probably "contract out" all the key issues (US-Iran engagement, the nuclear file, the economy) to trusted advisors not under Presidential control. If Mousavi wins, our contact expects "rapid reciprocity" to recent USG gestures towards Iran (of which President Obama's Cairo speech was "the most eloquent"), with real engagement likely as soon as a new GOI is in place, likely by September.
End summary

The most dynamic week in Iranian politics

¶2. (S) We met today with Kia Tabatabaee (please protect), a former Iranian Foreign Ministry Director General who has been the Istanbul-based Developing 8 Organization for Economic Cooperation (D-8) Executive Director since summer 2006. Tabatabaee, who officially retired from the Iranian MFA in January 2009 (he was on secondment at the D-8 until then), remains close to former colleagues who served with him under President Khatami, reflects a pragmatic wing of Iranian politics and foreign policy, and is a willing contact of ours, eager to encourage the engagement process.

¶3. (S) Turning immediately to Iranian politics ("the D-8 isn't doing much right now"), he said that in his 30 years working for the Islamic Republic of Iran he had never witnessed such a dynamic week in Iranian politics, even in comparison to Khatami's 1997 election or the July 1999 student riots. Tabatabaee said the combination of the six head-to-head debates (in which Iranian voters witnessed the televised airing of corruption allegations and personal attacks among candidates for the first time in the GOI's history); the massive, peaceful pro-Mousavi rallies in Tehran, Esfahan and other cities; and the circulation of the June 9 letter from Rafsanjani to Khamenei warning the Supreme Leader to of the risk to the entire system if Ahmadinejad wins a fraudulent election; are "shocking and unprecedented." He welcomed the accountability that televised debates had brought to the process, and noted that the surge of youth

interest and activism in the elections boded well for Iran's political future, "as long as it stays at least this democratic."

¶4. (S) But he also expressed concern that such new experiences with "the volatility of a real democratic election" could trigger a backlash if any demonstrations over the next few days "mistakenly cross the red-line" of challenging the system itself. Rafsanjani's letter, he suggested, while important for setting an ultimatum against a fraudulent election, has also weakened the credibility of the position of the Supreme Leader as the system's final arbiter.

He also interpreted the letter as a warning from Rafsanjani ("the power broker behind Khamenei being Supreme Leader in the first place") that Khamenei's leadership position could be reconsidered if necessary (comment: by the Assembly of Experts, of which Rafsanjani is the head.) "Some interesting fissures are definitely appearing" in how the power centers interact with the Supreme Leader and each other, "beyond just what the candidates are saying and doing." Overall, he said this past week has left most Iranians anxious, giddy, hopeful, and "holding their breath" to see what happens June 12.

What will happen June 12?

¶5. (S) Tabatabaee agrees with the current conventional wisdom that neither Ahmadinejad nor Mousavi will win an outright majority on June 12. "The Mousavi, Kerroubi, and Rezai camps will scrutinize every polling station, and will be keeping their own accurate vote-count. This won't be a

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replay of the 2005 elections." In the second round, he assessed that "rural voters will hold the key." He expects to see the Basiji and other Ahmadinejad supporters organize a massive "get out the vote" campaign for the second round, with the possibility of generating a "rural surge" of several million more votes for Ahmadinejad in the second round than he receives in the first. If this happens, "Ahmadinejad is still the man to beat."

¶6. (S) Tabatabaee predicted that even if Ahmadinejad wins, however, Khamenei will keep him on "a very short leash." In that scenario, Ahmadinejad and Khamenei would both recognize that their own ability and latitude to lead by bringing Iran's competing power centers to consensus will be significantly restrained. "They can't go back to the way Ahmadinejad was running the government up until now." Instead, Tabatabaee would expect the Supreme Leader to "contract out" all the key issues, including US-Iran engagement, the nuclear file, the economy, and Afghanistan/Pakistan, to trusted advisors not under Presidential control. "Even if Ahmadinejad wins, the Supreme Leader wants engagement with the US to proceed, under his own control." If Mousavi wins, our contact expects more "rapid reciprocity" to recent USG gestures towards Iran (of which Tabatabaee called President Obama's Cairo speech "the most eloquent"). In that case, the USG can expect to see a real willingness by Iran to engage in face-to-face discussions on issues of mutual interest as soon as a Mousavi cabinet is fully in place, probably by early September, Tabatabaee said.

Comments

¶7. (S) After meeting us, Tabatabaee said he was headed directly to the airport to fly back to Tehran for ten days, to vote and "to witness personally this most amazing of times." We will solicit his analysis, on his return, of what the outcome will mean for US-Iran relations. End Comment.
WIENER